

Looking For Rainbows

In a Torah portion so filled with memorable stories, one stands just a bit above the rest. *Parashat Noach*, the second Torah portion of the yearly cycle of readings, includes the stories of Noah building the ark, the terrible flood, the Tower of Babel, and even the beginning of the Abraham narrative. But shining above all is a glorious rainbow, a symbol of God's covenant with humanity and all life, a symbol of peace and hope. The rainbow appears after the flood that destroyed so much life on earth and then . . .

*⁸God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ "I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come, ¹⁰ and with every living thing that is with you -- birds, cattle, and every wild beast as well -- all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth. ¹¹ I will maintain My covenant with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹² God further said, "This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you, and every living creature with you, for all ages to come. ¹³ **I have set My bow** in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will reaffirm My covenant between Me and you and every living creature among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. (Genesis 9:8-15)*

It's not as if our ancestors believed that God created the rainbow specifically for this occasion. Rather, after the disastrous experience of the flood, humanity understood the beauty of the rainbow as a sign of hope. Nearly eight hundred years ago, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban," 1195 Spain- 1270 Israel) taught that the accepted scientific explanation of rainbows was quite convincing. Rainbows are a natural phenomenon, not mystical miracles. And yet, natural wonders can represent symbolic significance that transcends the empirical.

Yes, there is a natural explanation for the appearance of the rainbow.

When sunlight passes through raindrops, the light is broken down into its seven-color spectrum: red moving the fastest and violet the slowest. The scattering is called refraction. This creates a rainbow. Actually, two rainbows are always created but one is usually very faint and appears just above the first rainbow. Look closely, and you will see that the colors of the second rainbow are reversed, with violet on top and red on the bottom.

While the science of rainbows is fascinating, it is the symbolism of rainbows that inspires us. After a storm, after a fearful experience, the arc of colors that shines in the sky lifts our spirits and renews our sense of goodness.

In the Torah, the rainbow symbolized God's covenant with humanity and all life. It represents a declaration from the Creator of all life that life itself will forever persevere. It reminds us never to give up hope. Storms end and life continues.

It seems as if we have been weathering one storm after another since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. Just as we see a bit of progress, another outbreak forces us to strengthen our precautions. This week, Temple Sinai had to impose additional restrictions in order to ensure the safety of our members and staff. We will not be able to permit members and guests to attend our *Erev Shabbat* and early Shabbat morning services in-person (with the notable exception of B'nei Mitzvah services). These restrictions will be in place at least until November 16 and will affect several of our beloved, annual services, including the Pink Shabbat service this Friday (October 23) and the Veterans Day service (November 13-14). We'll continue to hold both services, but the special speakers and presentations will be on Zoom immediately after the conclusion of the regular service (the services will be from 6:00-6:45 and the Zoom will start about 6:45pm). Our goodbye tribute to Greg and Ali Kellner on October 30 will also feature them on a Zoom (at 6:45pm) immediately after the conclusion of the Shabbat worship. Likewise, our long-delayed Confirmation service for the

class of 5780 is once again delayed until a date (TBD) in spring. Of course, all our Shabbat services will continue to be offered online both live and recorded. The hyperlinks for the services can be found on our Temple Sinai website and will be sent out each week on Snippets.

Yes, the disappointments keep coming as a flood. But just as it did for Noah, the flood will reside, and hope will renew. Our task is to keep safe, be smart, fight despair, lift up those who are struggling, and ready ourselves for the important tasks of rebuilding. Yes, there is a rainbow after every storm. Indeed, there are two! It is up to us to look for them and remind ourselves of the positive difference we can make!

Shabbat Shalom!

Rick

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